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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4804
INFO RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ALMATY PRIORITY 9666
RUEHAAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT PRIORITY 1386
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK PRIORITY 3839
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 0858
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 0984
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 1726
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE PRIORITY
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 6443
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 4594
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 9625
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 1002
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT PRIORITY 2078
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE PRIORITY 0955
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 3333
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 0520
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 8694
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 1417
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 021882

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TAGS: MOPS PK PTER PGOV

SUBJECT: SUICIDE ATTACK IN MALAKAND AGENCY KILLS 35
PAKISTAN TROOPS

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) This cable contains an action request; please see para. 9.

¶2. (C) Summary: At approximately 08:00 (local) November 8, a suicide attacker detonated a bomb at the front gate of Dargai Fort during morning exercises, killing himself and at least thirty five (35) Pakistani soldiers. Given the serious injuries suffered by other casualties, the death toll is expected to rise. This attack comes on the heels of an afternoon rocket volley on November 7 in Wana, South Waziristan, that disrupted Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) Governor Jan Orakzai's visit and caused his early return to Peshawar by helicopter. While the attack in Wana appears to have been a political ploy to intimidate and interrupt an otherwise successful tour of North and South Waziristan over two days, the suicide blast at Dargai Fort may be retaliation against the Pakistani Military's October 30 Bajaur madrassa airstrike.

¶3. (C) This attack on a Punjab Regiment training center in Dargai -- the bloodiest single action against the Army outside of hostilities with India -- is a significant strike against the most visible symbol of state control in the troubled border region. In light of the number of casualties and the potent symbolism of a successful attack on Pakistani security forces, post recommends that Department request high-level condolence messages from the White House to reaffirm U.S. support for Pakistan's commitment to defeating violent extremism in its tribal areas (see paragraph 9). End summary.

Attack on Dargai

¶4. (C) Initial reports from Dargai Fort, a Pakistani Military base in the settled NWFP area of Malakand, stated that a motorcyclist peeling off from a morning crowd of school children detonated an IED during 8:00am morning exercises on unwalled parade grounds outside the primary fort compound. The fort, an infantry training area for the Punjab Regimental Center Mardan, is approximately two hours drive northeast of Peshawar. Pakistani Military contacts confirm that the attacker arrived by motorcycle, then jumped off and ran into the front gates of the Fort's grounds before exploding the device. He was not engaged by any of the soldiers standing guard at the gate. An eyewitness placed the bomber at 15-20 years of age, and there is no word yet whether the bomb was a timed or command detonated device. At least thirty-five (35) soldiers are confirmed dead; two reliable Consulate contacts claim that up to twenty (20) more civilians and/or military personnel were killed. The injured are flooding into hospitals in Dargai, Mardan, and Peshawar.

Rockets fired at Governor's South Waziristan Gathering

¶5. (C) The attack at Dargai fort comes one day after two rockets landed near a jirga site in Wana, South Waziristan, where NWFP Governor Jan Orakzai was delivering an address. Militants apparently fired rockets that flew overhead during introductory remarks and landed about 250 meters away from the jirga site. The Governor was reportedly unfazed and finished his hour-long speech, but cancelled further engagements and flew by helicopter back to Peshawar. The Governor's office maintains his visit was not cut short and

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he returned to Peshawar on schedule. However, Peshawar contacts and press reports say he had planned to visit a madrassa in Wana, address another meeting of elders, and dedicate a new portion of a school in Wana before departing.

¶6. (SBU) While the press has sensationalized the Wana rocket fire as an assassination attempt on the Governor, his spokesman and Consulate contacts characterize the rocket fire as intimidation. No one was killed in the initial attack, but later in the evening, five more rockets landed in and around the Frontier Scouts' camp, killing one Frontier Corps soldier. In both instances, Scouts responded with 20-40 minutes of retaliatory fire into nearby hills, and they have reportedly detained seven alleged perpetrators of the attack.

¶7. (SBU) The Governor's visit to Wana was part of a broader tour of North and South Waziristan over November 6-7, in which he addressed tribal elders and lauded their implementation of the North Waziristan Agreement. The Governor hailed it as a conflict-resolution model for the world to emulate in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kashmir. The visit to Wana was Orakzai's first as NWFP Governor.

Comment

¶8. (C) Comment: The suicide bombing at Dargai Fort could be a retaliatory strike against the Pakistani Military's bombardment of the Zia-ul Uloom Taleemul madrassa-cum-militant training center in Bajaur Agency. While none have yet claimed responsibility for the attack, the physical and cultural proximity of Dargai Fort to Bajaur Agency and the clear targeting of a military base for a mass-casualty attack suggests such a linkage.

¶9. (C) Action Request: The Dargai attack is an assault on Musharraf's leadership in the war on terror and on his most important constituency, the Army. Both President Musharraf and Pak Mil need to know that the U.S. stands with them in the face of this direct assault on state authority. The Office of the Defence Representative - Pakistan (ODRP) has already contacted the Army's Director General - Military

Operations with a condolence message; CFC-A LTG Eikenberry intends to call Vice Chief of Army Staff GEN Ahsan on Thursday. Post strongly recommends:

-- a Presidential telephone call or message to President Musharraf that mourns the Pak Mil losses while commending Pakistan resolve to defeat this extremist threat; and

-- that the State Department spokesperson issue a statement of condolence and support at the daily press briefing. Post will provide recommended language to SCA/PPD separately.

¶10. (U) This cable was drafted in coordination with Consulate Peshawar.

CROCKER